

FINDING AND RECOMMENDATION(S)

Submitted by: Christy Daugherty, CAL FIRE Registered Professional Forester (RPF) #2600 contracted RPF to the California Tahoe Conservancy

Finding:

TRPA ordinance prohibits the use of heavy equipment on slopes greater than 30%. This regulation discourages fuel reduction work on steeper slopes by requiring the use of very expensive methods (helicopter), harvesting methods generally not readily available in the Basin (cable systems), or harvesting methods that are expensive, inefficient and not always capable of completely meeting fuel reduction goals (hand crews).

Background and Supporting Evidence:

Even a modest increase in the use of heavy equipment on steeper slopes (40%) will allow access to more material that can be removed, chipped or masticated rather than burned. Less pile burning would be required thereby reducing the amount of smoke created by fuel reduction projects. Most traditional cable yarding systems do not function well on slopes less than 40% due to lack of required deflection, making the use of equipment on slopes between 30 to 40% an important operational component.

Presently, the majority of the work on steeper slopes is being conducted using hand crews and pile burning. Hand crews cannot remove larger material and therefore often cannot meet basal area targets in fuels reduction prescriptions. Hand crews are much more expensive on a per acre basis as compared to equipment, and there are presently too few people available to do this type of work on a mass scale.

Recommendation:

Amend TRPA Ordinance to allow heavy equipment use on slopes up to 40% and allow consideration for heavy equipment operations on steeper slopes (greater than 40%). Explore eliminating the TRPA ordinance regarding equipment use on steep slopes and as an alternative, adopting the California Forest Practice Act and Rules related to heavy equipment use on steep slopes. (Nevada and the USFS may have other regulations to defer to).

Impacts of Implementation:

REQUIRED analysis of impacts on the following factors:

- ☐ Cost – reduces operational costs to land managers by eliminating the need to use expensive, inefficient methods on steep slopes.

Increases the number of acres where biomass and commercial wood products can be accessed.

- ☐ Funding source - none
- ☐ Staffing – none
- ☐ Existing regulations and/or laws - TRPA Code of Ordinance, Chapter 71.

OPTIONAL analysis of impacts:

- ☐ Operational – increases efficiency, reduces need for pile burning, increases opportunity to meet silvicultural prescriptions.
- ☐ Social – none
- ☐ Political – positive political demonstration of common sense by a regulatory agency.
- ☐ Policy - none
- ☐ Health and Safety - encourages fuel reduction projects on steep slopes to prevent catastrophic wildfires.
- ☐ Environmental – encourages fuel reduction projects on steep slopes that prevent catastrophic wildfires.
- ☐ Interagency - none